

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Look at Romans: Romans 9-11

In the opening remarks on this epistle it was pointed out that it is divided into three very definite sections:

- Chapters 1-8 deal with doctrine;
- Chapters 9-11 are dispensational; and
- Chapters 12 to 16 are practical.

Today we are to consider the middle of these three sections, that is chapters 9-11. These chapters are somewhat complex and it would be helpful if you had your Bible available. In chapters 1-5 the apostle had already spoken about Israel and of the privileges that were theirs as the children of God. For instance, in 3:2 they had the oracles of God and in 9:4-5 they were of the adoption; Israel is spoken of as God's son and firstborn, Exodus 4:22; the shekinah glory could be seen by the high priest in the Holiest of all; to them pertained the covenants of God, the law of God and the promises of God. All these were great privileges which Israel enjoyed. Lastly Christ, the Messiah had come among them as man. Despite all of this the whole nation had continuously rebelled against God, had become steeped in idolatry and ultimately God had to pronounce judgment upon them and firstly Ephraim had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians and then Judah had been overpowered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. So had begun the Times of the Gentiles during which God has put the Jewish nation 'on hold'. Now all, both Jew and Gentile are responsible to God and may be reconciled to Him only by responding to the gospel, preached by Paul, and based upon the atoning death of Christ. In 11:1 the apostle asks the question "Hath God cast away his people?" And he asks this after he had refuted in 9:6-13 the argument that they might have forwarded asking for some overriding privileges based on the ground that, because of their previous special position before God, they could justifiably claim such. What were the grounds that they could advance? Verses 6-8 they were the seed of Abraham, the father of the nation. So were the Ishmaelites, but it was in Isaac that the seed would be called. Very well, they were the descendants of Jacob. So were the Edomites but these were the children of the flesh but the true seed were the children of promise.

The first promise to Abraham was that his wife Sarah would have a son Genesis 18:10 and in due course Isaac was miraculously born. He became the father, by Rebecca, of twins who, even whilst they were still in the womb God decreed in Genesis 25:23 that "the elder should serve the younger". This prophecy was not of a personal character for in the event Esau never did serve Jacob. Indeed Jacob fled from Esau, feared him, sought to appease him and called him Lord. Rather it was to be interpreted nationally. Both sons became the head of a race. Verse 12, the quotation from Genesis was said before the twins were born; verse 13, "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated" is a quotation from Malachi 1:2-3 and was written some 1,000 years later. It is a relative statement and is illustrative of the sovereign ways of God. In electing, or choosing Jacob, had God acted unrighteously? Certainly not! It is not in response to man's vain confidence or his self willed exertion that God acts but he had said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion", verse 15 quoting Exodus 33:19. And according to His foreknowledge God elects such that His sovereign will might be carried out.

Pharaoh was another example. He had said "I know not Jehovah", and in so saying he sealed his doom. In all his wickedness God nevertheless sovereignly allowed him to retain his position of power in order that Jehovah's own power might be shown through Moses. He was a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction, but one with whom God endured much longsuffering - God did not fit him thus; he fitted himself. As such God permitted a judicial hardening of his heart and God was ultimately glorified in the eyes of the Egyptians. In verses 25-30 Paul shows from the Jews' own scriptures that it was ever God's intention to bless the Gentiles and in support of his contention quotes the prophet Hosea 2:23, "And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them who were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" and then chapter 1:10, "In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God". The former scripture is also used by the apostle Peter when writing to Jewish believers - 1 Peter 2:10. Both scriptures apply to Israel but Paul makes them apply to the Gentiles, even calling them sons of the living God. He shows that the ground on which they claimed divine privilege was swept away from under them. They had had their chance but, although a remnant had been saved, verse 21, Israel, as a nation, had clung to the law by which righteousness could never be attained. But the Gentiles had attained it by faith, believing on Christ who had been to the Jews a stumbling block.

In 10:1-13 the apostle deals with the subject of righteousness particularly 'the righteousness of God', an expression almost peculiar to the Roman epistle.

- In chapter 1:17 - it is revealed - in the gospel
- In chapter 3:21 - it is manifested - not by the law but by the work of Christ
- In chapter 10:3 - it has to be submitted to.

Remember Paul has the Jewish nation in mind and in these verses he states emphatically that the Jews, his own people, must believe the gospel just as the Gentiles. Now, it is not those who keep the law; that was ended in the death of Christ.

The great issue for the Jews is then, how can they attain the righteousness of God? There were but two ways of approach, firstly by keeping the law, but they had already attempted that and had miserably failed. The second way was the way of faith and Paul now shows how that Moses himself, the one through whom the law was given, was an advocate of it. In verse 5 we read, "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man who doeth those things shall live by them". That way had failed. He then goes on to quote Deuteronomy 30:11-14. We have it in verse 6, "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven?" Paul's comment is "that is, to bring Christ down". Christ, now in heaven has come down and died for our sins. He has completed the work, we do not need to go up and bring Him down again. Then in verse 7, "Or, who shall descend into the deep? That is to bring up Christ again from the dead. " This is not a verbatim quotation of Moses' words. He was speaking of the day when Israel would be restored to the place of Jehovah's blessing after centuries of disobedience and failure. She would listen to the word that Jehovah spoke, no longer the word of the law but the message of the gospel. She would listen and she would obey. And what was that word? Verse 8, "But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is the word of faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation". Salvation means being accounted as righteous before God and is claimed by

1. Confession of Christ as Lord; and
2. Belief in His resurrection.

The confession of this latter, if real, would of course imply the necessity of His death. Such faith is enjoined by Isaiah 28:16 "Thus saith the Lord God, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation. He that believeth shall not make haste". Here the reference is specifically to Christ and hence the Jews have no excuse. It is truly remarkable how Paul demonstrates that Moses, the very epitome of the law could be such a protagonist of the way of faith. Those Jews of old to whom he was speaking probably did not realise the underlying meaning of his words but Paul uses them to show that ultimately there would be blessing for all both Jew and Gentile, verse 13, and all was enveloped in the eternal counsels of God.

So in verses 14-21 whilst Paul has the Jew primarily in mind he goes on to show how God makes the gospel available to all. I have always thought how these verses show what a reasonable and understanding God we have. Not only has He made a full salvation available for us but He desires that all should be saved; He does everything to ensure that we know about it, and that it is eminently simple for us to receive. First of all the would-be recipient needs to call upon the giver that is God Himself. But they do not believe in Him for the simple reason that they have never heard about Him. They need a messenger to tell them and so God, in His grace sends out His preachers to make known the good news. This is a reference to Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation". But the last clause and the whole of verse 8 are omitted for that refers to a coming day when the reign of the Lord and Zion itself shall be re-established. Sadly Israel's unbelief persisted as was prophesied in Isaiah 53:1. "Who hath believed our report"?

Verses 17-21 give a summary of the divine way for the salvation of man. It is on the principle of faith and how does that faith arise? "Faith then is by a report, but the report by God's word". It is for every hearer of the good tidings to respond and believe - man has a responsibility to do that. Saving faith is not a gift from God as some teach but a choice that he has to make. Did Israel have any excuse for their unbelief? Should they have been ignorant of God's intended blessing of the Gentiles? Definitely not! Psalm 19:4 tells us, "Their sound went out into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world". Moses also says, in Deuteronomy 31:21, "I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation will I anger you". Isaiah 65:1-2, "is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not, I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me. But to Israel He saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people". God never withdrew His offer of mercy and blessing, constantly pleading with them. But they were an unbelieving and opposing nation.

In chapter 11 Paul views the present and future position with regard to both Israel and the Gentiles. God has granted blessing to the Gentiles whilst the mass of Israel remain in unbelief despite the fact that salvation is offered to them on the same basis as the Gentiles. He poses the question, Has God forsaken His people?. The answer is "Certainly not". Paul himself was an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham and the tribe of Benjamin. Once he was one of the greatest opponents of the gospel, wickedly hostile to the Lord Jesus Christ, but one who had found favour with God. He quotes the case of Elijah as illustrative of God never casting away His people no matter how great was the prevailing apostasy. Ahab the king and his wife Jezebel were fanatically anti-Jehovah substituting Baal for Him in the nation of Israel. The religious condition of the nation at that time was so bad that Elijah supposed that he was the only faithful one left. But no - God had reserved 7,000 for Himself, a perfect remnant who had not bowed the knee to Baal and had remained faithful to the true God. Likewise in the apostle's day there was an election of grace from among Israel. Notice it is of grace and not of the works of law. If it be of grace, then clearly it cannot be of works, for if it was so grace would no longer be grace. The latter part of verse 6 is probably an interpolation.

The mass of Israel in seeking righteousness by the works of the law had completely missed the mark but the remnant or election had obtained it. This was true at the time the apostle was writing this letter but such conditions would continue until the return of the Lord. Today probably most of us are acquainted with Jews who have been converted and have received The Lord. Such are part of the election today. Both Moses in Deuteronomy 29:3-4 and David in Psalm 69:22-23 had prophesied that such conditions would come to pass. In verse 11 Paul poses another question, "Have they (that is Israel) stumbled that they should fall?" Certainly they had come to grief at the stumbling stone (that is Christ) laid in Zion, but was this to their eternal perdition for this seems to be the sense of the word 'fall' in this context? Again the answer is 'Certainly not' but rather that God will use this stumbling to bring about a fulfilment of His eternal counsels. When the Jews fell in rejecting Christ God opened the door to the Gentiles and this to provoke the Jews to jealousy. Now Paul argues if the fall of the Jews has brought such blessing to the Gentiles how much greater that will be in a coming day when the Jews are restored.

In verses 13-14 Paul addresses the Gentiles directly. He was the apostle of the Gentiles and his earnest entreaty to them has for its objective the arousing of his fellow Jews that they too might believe and be saved. Verse 15 is, no doubt, a millennial scene. Then it will be that God's ancient people will have recognised the One whom they had rejected as their Messiah. He will be seated upon His throne as the world ruler, all nations being subject to Him with Israel being the pre-eminent one. The whole earth is under blessing. What is that "but life from the dead"?

In verses 16-25 Paul continues to address the Gentiles and illustrates the relative dealings of God with both Jews and Gentiles which he terms a mystery, something that had never before been revealed. He speaks of an olive tree and the thought appears to be that it portrays a position of privilege, the sphere of the blessings of God. It is a tree of promise and all who are part of it are enveloped by the favour of God. Israel was so to speak God's first choice. Abraham had been called out from the nations and made the depository of God's promises. Jeremiah tells us (chapter 2:3) that "Israel was holiness unto Jehovah and the firstfruits of His increase". Abraham was the root of the tree, Israel was its firstfruits. Remember it is not a tree of salvation but rather a place or position where God is able and willing to bless. Because of unbelief the Jews, the natural branches were cut off or removed from the place of blessing and the Gentiles, a wild olive tree, were grafted in. So now the Gentiles are in the place of blessing but it has to be made good by faith verse 20. But there is a warning. There is not only the goodness but also the severity of God. The Gentiles did not bear the root, the root bore them and if the natural branches could be cut off so could the wild. The time is coming when the full complement of the Gentiles will be saved and then the eyes of the Jewish nation shall be opened. They shall be restored to the place of blessing and all Israel shall be saved. The Deliverer will come out of Zion and the prophecy of Isaiah 59:20-21 will be fulfilled.

The chapter ends with a doxology of praise acknowledging the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God and ascribing glory to Him forever.

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